

Report of the LWVMC Delegates to the State LWV Convention June 2017

The convention took place in Leesburg June 10-11. Delegates from LWVMC included Susan Gurley, Elaine Head, Tom Head, Tamara Hodsden, Julia Lewis, and Carolyn Rude. Overall attendance was 101, representing 12 local leagues and 2 MAL (member-at-large) units (Fredericksburg and Roanoke Valley). Voting delegates: 74.

Summary Information on League Membership

From July 1, 2015, until the convention, statewide League membership has grown by more than 50%, from 987 to 1548. This growth includes 300 new members since February 2017. Roanoke Valley (representing Roanoke, Salem, Bedford, and Craig counties) was approved as a MAL unit April 19, 2017, (contact: Elizabeth Allran, eaapolitics@gmail.com). Washington County has recently earned League status (contact: Merry Jennings, merry.jennings@gmail.com)

Study, Task Forces Approved; Resolution Passed

The convention delegates approved one study and two task forces.

Study: Mental Health. A major update of 1980s studies to include substance abuse, group homes, changes in courts to put mentally ill in treatment facilities, not jails, and inclusion of broader services provided by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

Each League should be represented in the study. MC should identify our person.

Task Force: Women's Rights and VA Law. Goals: Review the outdated 1983 position to determine whether the goals have been achieved. Recommend to the LWV-VA whether to adopt the national position in place of the state position or to start a new study for an updated VA position.

Task Force: School Choice Legislation. Proposed by members of Prince William Area League. The purpose is to prepare resources with pros and cons of charter schools, vouchers, and additional types of school choice options for developing a tool for analysis of any proposed Virginia legislation in order to design advocacy in support or opposition of such legislation. (Five School Choice bills have already been proposed in the General Assembly.)

The delegates also approved retaining all current positions.

The convention delegates also passed a resolution supporting the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in Virginia:

Resolved that the League of Women Voters of Virginia endorses ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution proposed by the United States Congress on March 22, 1972, and ratified by 36 state legislatures, upon ratification by two more states--Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.; and be it

Resolved further that the League of Women Voters of Virginia will advocate for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment at the state level.

Breakout Sessions

What's Next for Virginia Redistricting? (Susan)

Brian.Cannon@OneVirginia2021.org, reported on the status of the redistricting lawsuits in Virginia and the processes related to them, along with the tremendous growth of OneVirginia2021 and upcoming events.

The Virginia courts are using “rational basis” review rather than the “strict scrutiny” approach for the redistricting law suits. The first two suits were based on racial gerrymandering. The first suit, the “Congressional,” has been resolved. The second, the “Third District,” is not yet settled, but will be reviewed in early fall this year by a three-judge panel, as will the latest OneVirginia2021 lawsuit, based on “Compactness.” This one is bi-partisan and not based on race. The Third District and Compactness suits will be reviewed again by a full judicial panel in late fall of this year, 2017.

January, 2019 will be the “first read,” January, 2020 will be “second read,” and November, 2020 the bill for nonpartisan redistricting will be on the Virginia state ballot.

Current support for OneVirginia2021: In 2015, Virginia supporters, including LWV, numbered 3,500. By 2017, the number has grown to approximately 50,000. On Primary Day, June 12 this year, there will be 10,000 supporters, with 650 working the polls.

Big Redistricting Events Coming Up:

- 1) The 2017 Governor’s race will be most important, since most candidates from both parties have voiced support for fair redistricting, with one marked exception
- 2) 2018 Possible Redraw (House of Delegates)
- 3) 2021 General Assembly redraws districts

Fracking in Virginia (Julia). This workshop was presented by Meghan Dorsett. She and Carol Lindstrom had done a lot of research for the state study.

I mentioned at the workshop that when Dick Cheney was vice president, he told the Fracking industry that they did not have to tell what chemicals they used. Meghan said that is not the case now. The companies use a blend of chemicals, and probably no two companies use the same blend.

Meghan suggested we attend local Planning Commission meetings, because they have information as to where fracking is taking place in their jurisdictions. Building inspectors are involved.

When a site has been selected, engineers must determine where the source of water is—a pond, a lake, a river, or an aquifer. If none are available, then water is trucked in.

Engaging New Activists with Sips & Civility (Carolyn, Tamara). Session could have been titled “How to Attract Young Professionals.” Amy Hjerstedt, LWF Falls Church. This League hosts monthly meetings at different restaurants at 7:30 pm. Mondays and Tuesdays are good because business is slow. Request for separate checks in advance. Posted LWV sign. Good “optics.”

A topic is established, not always political. Examples: voting rights, redistricting, money in politics, women in politics, immigration, environment, education, privatization, justice system, equal pay, government transparency. The topic should be something the host can find material on, including discussion questions. Roundtables of 6-8. A League member is at each table to moderate, keep conversation civil, take notes. Each person at table can say one thing in turn.

Other Leagues do similar things: “Hot Topics.” “Ask a Moderate.” Some Leagues have Civics game nights: “Oval Office”—play for electoral votes. Use Voter Naturalization booklet to ask questions. “Are you qualified to be a citizen?”

ERA: 2 Away! (Elaine, Susan)

This session was a recap of the Equal Rights Amendment and its journey from being introduced in Congress in 1923 and finally passing in Congress in 1972 to achieving ratification in 36 states 203 years later. Ratification in 38 states is required for it to become part of the Constitution. Nevada just passed it this spring to become the 36th state. Virginia has not ratified the ERA.

Suggestions for Action

- Go to any candidate event and ask the candidates about their intentions regarding the ERA. Tell them it's important to you and everyone, and that their answers will affect your vote.
- Google *Virginia General Assembly* and find your senator and delegate and their contact information. Email, phone or write to them stating your position about the ERA and ask them whether they support it and will vote for it in the next session. Ask for an answer in writing or make an appointment to talk with him or her. Ask your friends to do the same.
- Traditionally, Virginia's Senate has passed the ERA, while the House has not allowed it to get out of the House *Privileges and Elections Committee*. It rarely makes it to the Virginia House floor for a vote. Ask your delegate to accept and vote for ratification.
- Sponsor the showing of a documentary called "Equal Means Equal" (2016, 1 hr 33 min) as did the organization Women-Matter.
- Encourage male voters to express their support of the ERA. Everyone wins in a society where all citizens have equal legal rights.

Report on UN Commission on Women 2016 (Tamara).

Jill Follows of the Fairfax chapter LWV Delegate to CSW 61 (Report on the Proceedings of the 61st United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women)

LWV sends about 16 delegates each year and is granted speaking status at the UN Economic and Social Council. Some noteworthy statistics are women worldwide hold 23% of elected offices, 23% of women earn less than men in the same job, 86% of women are employed in agriculture and are thus more negatively affected by climate change and this equates to the feminization of poverty. The agreed to CSW 61 conclusions were: equal pay for equal work of equal value, women must transition to the formal economy, emphasize STEM education, mitigate climate change, improve access to health care for women, improve gender-responsive social services, equal sharing of family care responsibilities and condemn violence against women. LWV positions presented are: promote international peace, advance social/economic well-being, ensure respect for human rights, foster cooperation among nations, protect environment and achieve full & equal participation of women. She concluded by urging LWV members to develop dialog with the U.S. State Dept., embassies and consulates.

Voting Rights & Civil Rights in Virginia (Carolyn).

Carol Noggle: The League favors no-excuse absentee ballots.

This session was mostly led by Claire Guthrie Gastañaga, Director, ACLU-Virginia, who focused on ways to restore voting rights of felons. Some Leagues go to pre-release classes to inform people about their rights and how to get them restored. Prince William League has prepared a brochure on re-establishing voting rights to give to felons about to be released. People jailed for misdemeanors do not lose their voting rights.

Gun Safety: Can the Tide be Turned? (Tom, Susan).

This session reported on the LWV-VA Firearms Safety Task Force, which was established in 2015. The task force had a significant list of accomplishments from Spring 2016 through Spring 2017. Among these activities was passage of a domestic violence firearm permanent protective order (PPG) prohibition as part of a larger gun deal package (effective July 1, 2016). They also successfully lobbied the LWV-US to prioritize lobbying against National Concealed Carry Reciprocity in Congress.

A good portion of the session reported on the extent of gun violence in the United States including the following:

- Gun violence results in about 33,000 deaths each year
- 50 women are shot to death by an intimate partner in an average month
- Two children are killed weekly from unsecured guns
- Mass shootings have doubled in frequency since 2000

The task force called for the following action plan:

- 1) Call your elected officials regularly regarding gun safety
- 2) Write a letter to the editor
- 3) Attend town halls and question candidates on gun violence prevention
- 4) Educate through social media
- 5) Participate National Days of Action
- 6) Join or donate to a Gun Violence Prevention Group

Example questions were also presented for use in questioning candidates for office. One example question is: “Do you support expanding background checks to cover all gun sales?”

Making Democracy Work with Action: LWV-VA’s 2017-2018 Budget (Elaine, Tamara)

The Operating Budget was approved by the Delegates to the Convention. The Education Fund Budget is approved by the Board of Trustees (Board of Directors of LWV-VA).

The **Operating Budget** is balanced with an income of \$49,65.00 and the same for expenses.

- The State PMP (Per Member Payment) for local leagues remains at \$16.00.
- Dues for Individual Members at Large are \$50.00 and \$48 for MAL Unit Members.
- Membership dues include: 996 primary @\$16, 140 household @\$8, 65 Life @\$0, and 18 student @\$8.
- Membership in local leagues has increased and there are two new MAL Units (Fredericksburg and Roanoke Valley). The Roanoke Valley MAL Unit was just formed in April and already has 27 members.
- Projected Donations (\$3,000) are down for members, but new categories for giving will be promoted for members as well as for businesses.
- No new Grant money is being projected.
- Transfer from Savings for 2017–2018 I projected to be \$7,413.
- Rent for a new League office has been reduced; however Telephone and Internet costs are no longer included in the rent.
- Compensation of \$13,600 for an Independent Contractor: 8 hrs/wk average for Admin. Work and 8 hrs/wk average for Treasurer support. (50 wks @\$17 /hr.)
- The 6-week legislative session includes \$1500 for members’ local accommodations.

- The Voter Express will be emailed to those with email addresses. Fifty members do not have email addresses and hard copy will be mailed to them.

The proposed **Education Budget** for 2017-2018 is balanced with an income of \$12,559 and expenses of \$12,559.

- Tax Deductible Donations from members are projected to be \$5,400.
- Carryover of non-restricted funds in checking are at \$6,103.
- Voter Service Activities are funded at \$8,950 with the bulk of it for Candidate Debates and Vote 411.
- Reimbursement of Admin Expense to LWV-VA is \$2,943.

Using Technology to Understand Members (Carolyn, Tamara, Susan). Beth Tudan of Fairfax demonstrated a website hosted by SquareSpace (rather than LEW) at <https://www.lwv-fairfax.org/>; an electronic weekly newsletter prepared with Constant Contact; and other software useful for staying in contact with surveys (SurveyMonkey), RSVPs (Eventbrite, SignUpGenius); and social media.

Action: Carolyn will explore the website. It looks more current and easier to use than the LEW site, and it might be cheaper than LEW—but technically more challenging. MailChimp (free) might do as much as we need for contacting members, saving the cost of Constant Contact.

Transparency Virginia Report. Transparency Virginia is a collection of advocacy groups and nonprofits formed prior to the 2015 General Assembly session and led by Anne Sterling. Other organizations: AARP, Brady Campaign, VA Coalition for Open Government, Virginia NOW, Virginia Poverty Law Center. The purpose is to determine how well lawmakers adhere to transparent practices: **meeting notices, consideration** (was there opportunity for every bill to be heard in a public forum?), **voting** (recorded vote on the final disposition of bills so that the public could determine how members voted). A report is available at <https://transparencvirginia.wordpress.com>.

Featured Speakers

Phyllis J. Randall, Chair of Loudon County Board of Supervisors

Phyllis noted all the many ways women striving to achieve at higher levels are faced with minimization and that political office is the same. She noted how she lost many elections so kept running for higher ones until she achieved success. Phyllis emphasized the importance of emphasizing to young women the importance of voting, starting small such as in the PTA and then running for local office. They have been successful in pairing LWV with the service sorority Delta Sigma Theta locally to educate and grow voter registration. She ended by reminding us that the first thing politicians check with they receive a complaint is whether or not the complainant voted. If not, their complaint is often put aside.

Jessica Jones Capparrell, Grassroots advocacy manager LWVUS

Jessica reviewed activities and resources for local leagues. (She talked too fast for good notes, and the website is difficult to search.) A takeaway: Best way to communicate with Congress: phone. Also emails. Legislators are looking for counts. Contact in different ways. Letter writing and postcard campaigns are effective at local and state levels on issues like zoning. Use bright colors. Develop relationships with staff members.

Use house parties to discuss issues; neighbor to neighbor to gather more folks; use LWV "Alerts" for newcomers; action kits on issues available at LWV website and Lobby Core.

Brenda Rogers, LWVUS Liaison to LWV-VA: Celebrating our History; Envisioning our Future

Brenda reminded us that the LWV will celebrate its 100-year anniversary in 3 years.

She used the metaphor of the journey and the need for transformation to increase engagement and power. The vision and principles remain constant (Making Democracy Work). The mission is education and advocacy, voter registration, and empowering citizens to shape better communities. The vision for the future: Be the #1 organization to register voters, the authoritative voice on election reform, and work to create an electorate that represents the diversity of the US population. She emphasized Engage and Empower; modify our "usual" to have younger members able to attend; and develop a membership engagement structure (perhaps mentoring?).

Dahlia Lithwick, Senior Editor, *Slate*. (Law degree from Stanford; has covered the Supreme Court for a couple of decades; such a good speaker that I wish we could afford to bring her to MC) As many as 4 vacancies could open on the Supreme Court in the near future. Clarence Thomas and Anthony Kennedy are rumored to be considering retirement as early as this summer. Stephen Breyer, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Anthony Kennedy are 80ish. Blocking of Garland: a missed chance to have a Court with a center (Rogers moving left, Breyer moving right). Voters who prioritized the Supreme Court in the 2016 election chose Trump 2:1.

Nancy Rodrigues, Virginia Secretary of Administration. 43,000 new registrations of high school students this year. 12 high schools met the challenge of 65% registrations. Millennials are voting in VA: 60%. McAuliffe vetoed about 120 bills; 10% were voting bills. Voting integrity: have shut down Internet in polling places.

Notes

The 100-year anniversary of the LWV is in 2020. We should begin planning how MC might mark this date. Library exhibits VT/MC? Event? Publicity?

Also, the 2019 commemoration of Virginia's beginnings at Jamestown is coming up. Information at <http://www.americanevolution2019.com>

We should plan a Board Orientation. Carolyn has started discussion with Lois Page about a possible October date.